

# Cooperative Work as a Measure of Youths' Self-Employability in Mbenjom-Awing Community of the North West Region Cameroon

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## ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes cooperative work in Mbenjom-Awing as a measure of youths' self-employability. Cooperative work for youths' self-employability has been a challenge in youths' education for entrepreneurship. The cooperative work system builds the link between informal and formal education to promote youths' skill development abilities thereby preparing them towards psychological, financial and economic independence. The research made use of the cross-sectional research design to test cooperative work activities as a measure of youths' self-employability. Data were collected from 180 research participants with males (37.8%) females (60.6%) using the questionnaire survey. Analysis of scale's internal reliability was significant and data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results indicated significant positive correlation among variables: Cooperative work  $r=0.307$ ,  $n=180$ ,  $p=0.01$ , showing acceptance and significance of the proposed model of analysis. Data analysis confirmed that cooperative work activities were significant determinants of youths' self-employability. Suggestions were made for another study in an urban population, on different aspects of peer life in relation to self-employability in a relatively calm socio-political environment.

**KEYWORDS:** *Youths, cooperative work, self-employability*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Work values for youths' skill development in rural communities has been a challenge in youths' education for entrepreneurship. The Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) advocates that learning should enable creativity and develop self-employable competences that prepares youths for tomorrow's citizens and workers. Youth cooperative endeavours stands indispensable in transmitting work values and skills to youths. Communal life plays a pivotal role in skill transmission for sustainable livelihoods among the youths. Joint ventures, team spirit, participation, leadership and respect of community values shape work perception and teaching processes and it is guided by oral doctrine, observation, imitation, hands-on-learning, practice and social interaction for effective education (Fomba, 2009). In Cameroon educational system today, the struggle is to mainstream traditional education, co-curricular activities and entrepreneurship to bridge the gap between formal, non-formal and informal education. Local knowledge is still useful today and showing no sign of disappearing from the educational landscape

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in general and Cameroon in particular, (Nsamenang, 1992, 2005). The non-disappearance of the indigenous knowledge from the education of the youths in Cameroon is as a results valuation in-context of the community ideas, values, beliefs which is difficult to depart from the population as a result of survival of dominant indigenous knowledge.

With the present drive towards self-employability (SE), youths in rural areas are synergizing through cooperative work (eshi'i, afa'ah-laah) and learning to overcome poverty and the outcome is seen in skill acquisition, mindset change, risk taking, creativity and relationships. Cooperative ventures are appreciated in rural communities as a utilitarian means for peers to build work perception and skills due to the prevalence of the community identity, 'the we' concept. It also mitigates juvenile delinquency, crime wave, banditry and stress among the youths as the community identity brings an invisible cohesion, conviviality and fraternity among the local inhabitants.

## 2. Cooperative work and youths' self-employability in Mbenjom-Awing

The rural economy of Mbenjom is characterized by activities such as crop cultivation (maize, beans, cassava, potatoes,), livestock rearing (pig, poultry, rabbit, goat,), fishing, gardening (green spices, onion, carrots, green beans,). Such work activities are championed by youths in the informal and non-formal education sectors, even youths who are students in formal education settings still practice with the non-student population of the community, thus, the link between informal and formal education systems. Away from agriculture, youths also engage in livelihood activities such as carpentry, drawing, painting blacksmithing, tailoring, hair dressing, glass cutting, building and construction to enhance self-employability and rollback poverty and dependency. Most of these activities are carried out in cooperative manner where senior peers in the age set serve as tutors to their junior ones.

## 3. Theoretical positioning and literature

Theory and literature have been identified in the debate on youth cooperative work teaching and learning process as a strategic measure on sustainable youths' skill development. Entrepreneurship education according to (Fomba, 2013) has therefore caught the attention of scholars, experts and researcher as empirical evidence is on the rise. The situated learning theory (Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, 1991) and the theory of Social Ontogenesis (Nsamenang, 2006) have been used in analyzing youth cooperative work and self-employability with evidence from Mbenjom community in Awing. The theory of Social Ontogenesis (SO) focuses on the development of the individual from the cultural perspective. It holds that though human development is biological, the African worldview sees it in a dual perspective; biological and cultural. The African worldview sees human development in three cyclical forms; the spiritual selfhood, social selfhood and ancestral selfhood. The author holds that work skill abilities start at childhood and it is segmented into three areas; social apprenticeship and novice, social entrée, and probation and socialized internship. The 'social entrée and socialized internship paradigm' in work culture transmission is highly practiced in most communities to enhance youths' independence and entrepreneurial and vocational skills, (Fomba, 2011). Children socialise to acquire cognitive skills or patterns of intelligence that exist in their culture. In accordance with the theory of social ontogenesis, learning is prominent during the social entree and socialised internship period where boys and girls with peers of the same sex interact and do task work. At the puberty and adulescenthood stages, youths connect

and interact with fellow mates ranging from the family circles, neighborhood and the community at large and the socialized internship helps guide them to learn vocational skills for self-employability in the community. Studying gender stereotypes and students career choices in selected secondary schools in Mezam division of North west region, Enow Marie (2013) concluded that gender stereotyping leads to vocational specialization among boys and girls, this help to build vocational competencies in particular fields necessary for self-employment. Therefore, youth cooperative work plays an important role towards their vocational specialization and self-employability.

The Situated Learning Theory (Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, 1991) has been the frequently used theoretical framework in recent studies of peer work teaching and learning intention. The theory explains vocational learning as a function of the following: Knowledge is not an object and memory is not a location, knowing, learning and cognition are socially constructed, interpreted and supported. Construction of meaning is tied to specific contexts and purposes. Situations shape individual's cognition, individual thinking and action shape the situation.

Interactive participation results to 'adaptive' skills, as well as successful learning and reasoning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). However, there is an assumed correlation between youth cooperative endeavors in work value transmission and youths' self-employability (Fomba, 2009), necessitating youths to consider peer cooperative ventures as a career development option. Employability has become a key concept in many disciplines and professions and more emphasis is laid on learning outcomes (Fomba, 2011). Serpell (2011) in a study on Peer Group Cooperation as a Resource for Promoting Socially Responsible Intelligence among the rural Chewa community of Zambia (*nzelu*: skill, cleverness, intelligence and wisdom) concluded that a socially responsible form of intelligence is intimately connected with the value of cooperation (*kugwirizanandianzache*), and emphasis is placed on peer group cooperation by the Child-to-Child (CtC) approach to education which is a guiding principle in informal education sector where youths need to cooperate in order to develop skills for self-employment in the changing labour market.

Within the Cameroon education and employment policy drive, there has been much cry to link schooling and informal education for youths' vocational skill development. With the existence of this discrepancy, the communities have taken up an unconscious engagement to respond to the questions

of employability of community youths and the cooperative work 'eshi'i' has been seen as resilient and optimistic relieve to the problems of employability among youths. Thus, bridging the gap and promoting the self-employability in the labour market in Cameroon.

The study places youth cooperative work as a determinant of youth's self-employability. The analysis throws light on the hypothesis developed in the study and the study was designed to answer the key question presented below.

In what way will youth cooperative work influence youths' self-employability in Mbenjom community?

#### 4. Methodology

Participants in this study were community youths engage in vocational activities drawn from various neighborhoods in Mbenjom and data was obtained from 180 participants (male=37%, female=60.6%) The convenient sampling technique was used to select respondents. The youth cooperative work and self-

employability questionnaire (YCWSEQ) with a 5-point scale was used in data collection and it was presented in English language. Ethical and informed consent were met based on American Psychological Association (APA) ethics code. Responses were coded ranging from "Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree". Participants were to choose an alternative from the scale. Analysis of sub scale's consistency was significant: Youth Cooperative work  $r=0.307$ ,

#### 5. Results

The overall goal of the study was to investigate whether youth cooperative work can influence youths' self-employability in Mbenjom-Awing; results have been presented base on research question.

#### Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to sum up data and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to find out relationships among variables and presented on table 1 below. Participants' responses were positive in line with the variable  $P < 0.01$

**Table 1: Youth Cooperative work as a measure of youths; self-employability**

Indicators	Alternatives %					N	M	SD	SE
	SA	A	N	D	SD				
I gain skills when i work with different youth groups in the community	55.6	41.7	2.2	0.6	0	180	4.52	0.576	0.043
I learn more when i work in a team	69.4	29.4	1.1	0	0	180	4.68	0.490	0.037
I acquire vocational skills when i participate in community work.	51.7	27.8	20	0	0.6	180	4.3	0.825	0.061
I learn when a group member is leading	66.7	32.2	1.1	0	0	180	4.66	0.499	0.037
When i respect the rules and regulations of the community i gain knowledge	41.1	56.6	2.2	1.1	0	180	4.57	0.588	0.044
<b>Aggregate score</b>	<b>284.5</b>	<b>187.7</b>	<b>26.6</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>22.73</b>	<b>2.978</b>	<b>0.222</b>

Table 1 analyses the importance of youth cooperative work being carried out by youths as a means of vocational skill development with regards to the labour market. The first indicator shows the level of agreement and disagreement by respondents that joint ventures are a core factor of self-employability. Majority strongly agreed (55.6%) and followed by agreed (41.7%) that joint venture is instrumental in self-employability. Among the indicators of youth cooperative work it has a mean value of ( $M=4.52$ ;  $SD=0.576$ ;  $SE=0.043$ ). The second indicator looks at team work in relation to cooperative work and 69.4% strongly agreed to the relevance of team work as responsible for youths' self-employability, as for agree participants expressed a 29.4% and neutrality (1.1%). And for strongly disagree 0.00% responded. The mean of this indicator is 4.68 while  $SD=.490$  and the  $SE=.037$ .

The third indicator deals with participation in youth cooperative work in relation to youths' self-employability in the labour market, 51.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that participation in cooperative work determines youths' self-employability while 27.8% agree that participation in cooperative work promotes youths' self-employability. 20.0 are neutral to the fact and 0.0 disagree while 0.6 strongly disagree. This sums up with a mean of 4.30,  $SD=.825$  and  $SE=.061$ . The fourth indicator talks on leadership in youth cooperative work as a determinant of youths' self-employability having those who strongly agree at 66.7%, agree at 32.2%, neutral 1.1%, then disagree and strongly disagree at 0.0%. All sums up with a mean of 4.66,  $SD=.499$ ,  $SE=.037$ . The fifth indicator shows the level of agreement or disagreement of participants that the respect of community values serve as a key point to youths' self-employability in the labour market. 56.6% of the respondent agreed that the respect of community values leads to youths' self-employability while 41.1% strongly agree to the fact. 2.2% are

neutral while 1.1% disagrees and 0.0% strongly disagrees to the fact that the respect of community values determines youths' self-employability.

Conclusively, the aggregate score of the above indicators of youth cooperative work as a measure of youths' self-employability are: strongly agree =284.5; agree =187.7; neutral =26.6; disagree =1.7; strongly disagree =0.6. The total number of participants are 900, Mean =22.73; standard deviation =2.978 and standard error =0.222. Out of 900 participants 284.5 strongly agree that youth cooperative work and its indicators greatly determine youths' self-employability in the labour market.

### Hypothesis testing

H<sub>01</sub>: There is a significant relationship between youth cooperative work and youths' self-employability in Mbenjom-Awing

H<sub>a1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between youth cooperative work and youths' self-employability in Mbenjom-Awing

**Table 2: Relationship between youth's cooperative work and self-employability**

		Cooperative work	Self-employability	Mean	Standard deviation
Cooperative work	Pearson Correlation	1	.307**	22.5278	1.83824
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000		
	N	180	180		
Self-employability	Pearson Correlation	.307**	1	22.7111	1.56601
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	180	180		

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From results of the analysis on cooperative work and self-employability presented on table 2, it showed that youth cooperative work has a strong positive correlation with self-employability of youths; the results showed as follows,  $r = .307$ ,  $N = 180$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . It therefore implies that cooperative work increases the degree of skill development in the youths. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis upheld.

### 6. Discussions

The research hypothesis concluded that there is a significant relationship between youth cooperative work and youths' self-employability showing  $r = .307$  >  $p = 0.01$ . In accordance with the theory of social ontogenesis by Nsamenang (2006) which highlights that learning is prominent during the social entree and social internship period where boys and girls with peers of the same sex do task work. This is evident in cooperative working teaching during this period where peers teach and learn through observation, participation and imitation from one another in the community. At the puberty and adolescence stages, peers connect and interact with fellow mates ranging from the family circles, neighborhood and the community at large and this socialized internship helps guide them to learn vocational skills for self-employability in the community. Enow Marie (2013) researching on gender stereotypes and students career choices in selected secondary schools in Mezam division of north west region concluded that gender stereotyping leads to vocational specialization among boys and girls, this help to build vocational competencies in particular fields necessary for self-employment. Therefore, cooperative work plays an important role towards youths' vocational

specialization and self-employability. Kibungla (2016) researching on Peer Group Activities and the Mastery of Some Life Skills in three secondary schools in Bamenda two Sub Division in the North West Region of Cameroon, concluded that communication, cooperation and participation enhances the mastery of life skills, furthermore, he concluded that there is a significant difference between peer group activities in single sex school and mixed sex schools in Bamenda two Sub Division. His findings are relevant to this study in that peer group activities such as cooperation, communication, and participation help in the development of life skills. As such, this current work focusing on youths cooperative work as a determinant of self-employability directly relates with the.

In line with the above hypothesis, Serpell's study on Peer Group Cooperation as a Resource for Promoting Socially Responsible Intelligence among the rural Chewa community of Zambia. (nzelu: skill, cleverness, intelligence and wisdom) concluded that a socially responsible form of intelligence is intimately connected with the value of cooperation (*kugwirizanandianzache*), and emphasis is placed on peer group cooperation by the Child-to-Child (CtC) approach to education which is a guiding principle in

informal education sector where youths need to cooperate to develop skills for self-employment in the changing labour market

### Conclusion

Cooperative work and youths' self-employability are key issues that most communities and economies are battling with. From a general point of view, peer group influence which is grossly seen to have negative influence on other youths, on the contrary is an aspect that parents, care givers, community leaders, teachers, school administrators and counselors need to encourage carefully because it plays an important role in building vocational skills in youths which are necessary for self-employment in the rapidly changing labour market nowadays.

Noting that cooperative work rest on the following indicators mindset change, skill development, risk taking, creativity and relationships. The study was designed to investigate the influence of cooperative work on youths' self-employability with implications for vocational counselling. The most important result gotten from this study showed that cooperative work is a great determinant of youths' self-employability in the labour market.

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